

# **RUMINATIONS OF IPOME**

**Kenneth Usongo**



VISIT...

LANZAROTE  
*Caliente*.COM

---

# Ruminations of Ipome

---

Kenneth Usongo



*Langua Research & Publishing CIG*  
*Mankon, Bamenda*

***Publisher***

*Langaa* RPCIG

Langaa Research & Publishing Common Initiative Group

P.O. Box 902 Mankon

Bamenda

North West Region

Cameroon

[Langaagrp@gmail.com](mailto:Langaagrp@gmail.com)

[www.langaa-rpcig.net](http://www.langaa-rpcig.net)

Distributed in and outside N. America by African Books Collective

[orders@africanbookscollective.com](mailto:orders@africanbookscollective.com)

[www.africanbookcollective.com](http://www.africanbookcollective.com)

*ISBN: 978-9956-791-82-8*

© Kenneth Usongo 2014

**DISCLAIMER**

All views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Langaa RPCIG.

## Dedication

*Dedicated to I.A. Usongo: An exemplary father*



# Table of Contents

---

|                                                |           |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Foreword</b> .....                          | ix        |
| <b>Preface</b> .....                           | xi        |
| <b>Loss &amp; Love</b>                         | <b>1</b>  |
| Ipome.....                                     | 3         |
| Weighted Memories.....                         | 5         |
| We Remember.....                               | 6         |
| Down by the hills and valleys of Njembeng..... | 7         |
| Muted Voices.....                              | 8         |
| On Crossing the Threshold.....                 | 9         |
| Reminiscence.....                              | 10        |
| You are not gone.....                          | 11        |
| The Cradler.....                               | 12        |
| The Hawk.....                                  | 13        |
| Moments.....                                   | 14        |
| The Vision.....                                | 15        |
| The Search.....                                | 16        |
| Legs.....                                      | 17        |
| Garnering.....                                 | 18        |
| Engo'o.....                                    | 19        |
| Loneliness.....                                | 20        |
| <b>Nature &amp; Seasons</b> .....              | <b>21</b> |
| Where am I?.....                               | 23        |
| Echoes of the Sea.....                         | 24        |
| Park Memories.....                             | 25        |
| Clusters of trees.....                         | 26        |
| Long Holidays.....                             | 27        |
| Saturday Nite.....                             | 28        |

|                                 |           |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Nightfall.....                  | 29        |
| Cricket Hunting.....            | 30        |
| Grasshoppers.....               | 31        |
| Death.....                      | 32        |
| Christmas.....                  | 33        |
| Sunday.....                     | 34        |
| Forlorn.....                    | 35        |
| <b>Culture.....</b>             | <b>37</b> |
| The Squirrel.....               | 39        |
| The Rooster.....                | 40        |
| The Maiden Spirit.....          | 41        |
| The Diviner.....                | 42        |
| Who am I?.....                  | 43        |
| The Pacifier.....               | 44        |
| Atupid.....                     | 45        |
| Ululations.....                 | 46        |
| <b>People &amp; Places.....</b> | <b>47</b> |
| Once there lived a Lady.....    | 49        |
| Ngebe.....                      | 50        |
| Takumbeng.....                  | 51        |
| The Village Courier.....        | 53        |
| Okakan.....                     | 54        |
| The Extraordinary Pupil.....    | 55        |
| The Parade.....                 | 56        |
| Unoh Market.....                | 57        |
| Eba.....                        | 58        |
| Bamenda.....                    | 59        |
| Kuyam.....                      | 60        |
| Africa.....                     | 61        |



|                                        |           |
|----------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Ethics &amp; Politics.....</b>      | <b>63</b> |
| Forsaken Dream.....                    | 65        |
| Brighten the Corner where You are..... | 66        |
| Medal.....                             | 67        |
| What's Truth?.....                     | 68        |
| Money.....                             | 69        |
| Repassez Demain.....                   | 70        |
| Everyone.....                          | 71        |
| Portrait of a Land Rover.....          | 72        |
| The Woodpecker.....                    | 73        |
| The Prophet.....                       | 74        |
| Here They Come Again.....              | 75        |
| The Gadfly.....                        | 76        |
| Tell me What it is.....                | 77        |
| The Messiah.....                       | 78        |
| The Griots.....                        | 79        |



## Foreword

---

Kenneth Usongo's maiden creative work, *Ruminations of Ipome*, is a reflection of the life journey he, like most of his contemporaries, has undertaken. These pieces are unique in their ways as each of them embraces a different theme and uses language and imagery that are personal, private and "sacred" to the poet to give the work its unique identity. The poems span the American continent as well as his native African continent, bridging this huge conglomeration of cultures into one continuous experience of humanity. This breadth and depth gives the work its versatility and availability, for it has something to offer all the readers, something to identify with or to recognize, to contemplate or to wave away, to embrace or to shy away. His experiences captured in these pieces and the projections of his imagination render some readers' anxieties less palpable as they measure their own states of mind with the protagonist's.

Crafty in the language of the people and written in a tone that combines the hushes of betrayal, the jubilation of celebration, the victory of life, the frustration of defeat, the exhilaration of new found love, the disappointments of great political expectations, and the failure to carve a personal niche in a global society still in the thralls of a Yeatsian gyration, Usongo's poetry transcends place, time and nationality. I will strongly recommend this book to lovers and students of the human soul, and as a window to the other world, which is both alien and immediate.

Emmanuel Ngwang  
Jarvis Christian College  
Hawkins, TX 75765  
February 24, 2014



## Preface

---

*Ruminations of Ipome* primarily demonstrates my poetic expression of emotions towards my father and artistic muse, I.A. Usongo, who transitioned to the next realm of life in 2010. In this poetry collection, I have attempted to transcend his mind, posthumously representing his thoughts, feelings, and world view. My artistic endeavour has been guided by the will to recapture his perception of love, nature, family, people, and other aspects of life.

The placing of some poems under specific sections in this book is not hermetic, because some of the poems may as well be grouped under different poetic segments simultaneously. For example, although “Takumbeng” is categorized under people & places, it can also conveniently fall under the rubric of culture. In other words, my placement of a poem under a particular fragment is essentially the result of dominant features evident in the poem.



## Ipome

Lit your face was whenever we were around you

Testament of joy and pride

*Amianang*\*<sup>1</sup> you were known to kids

*Pala pala, pala pala*

Dance

*Pala pala, pala pala*

They greeted you

Integrity

Sociable

Admirable

Adorable

Clairvoyant

Pioneer in your every enterprise

Indomitable in spirit

Indefatigable in endeavour

Chairman

Teacher

Judge

Councillor

Infectious were your jokes

Community mentor and educationist

You are my rock and inspiration

We mourn and we delight

For your gift of life

For your frankness, honesty, and discipline

A man of your word

Proud am I of you on tree tops, valleys, and mountains

Broom, rake, cutlass in hand  
Early morning sweeping and cleaning whistling  
These tasks translate your systematic vision of life  
You taught me all except how to live without you  
Now free you are of anguish  
But beaming as your legacy lives on

Our spiritual connection with you remains engraved in our  
minds  
We muse on your love  
We muse on your acuity, kindness, understanding, tenacity,  
ardour  
You pushed us, testing limits  
Of intellect, love, and grace  
In your infancy you bartered cocoyam for “I chev”<sup>\*2</sup>  
Tiny may be our voices  
In the firmament you grin  
As we tread in your trail

The void you have created  
The love we miss by your absence  
Our hearts forever with fondest memories of you  
Thou shall not question God  
Good an earthly fight you fought  
Favour you have in His eye

Forever miss love  
Today is tomorrow

<sup>\*1</sup> Swallowing cocoyam

<sup>\*2</sup> Reference to a few English words



## Weighted Memories

Every day brings weighted memories  
Of your cheery outlook and beaming face  
Every night brings fresh memories  
Of your sanguinity and sensibility  
Fond memories of your infectious jokes  
Every day fresh with your genuineness and generosity  
Every hour makes us better humans  
Every minute is weighted by your decency and discipline  
We plough into your trove of wisdom  
Of stories, persons of yore who aspired and inspired  
Your selflessness and sensitiveness drive us on  
Sanitizing our raw emotions  
Sublimating our thoughts  
Chastened by your spirit  
We strive and thrive in your drive.

## **We Remember**

We remember your lament about moral erosion in humans  
We remember your taunt on kids  
On hot cooked cocoyam scalding their lips  
We remember your flair for humour  
Food never rebels against the mouth  
About a couple consuming a full goat  
We remember your dedication to pedagogy  
Moulding minds at the elementary level  
We remember your indomitable spirit  
Proud in dignity and humility  
As you raged against superciliousness  
Daring upstarts to ground themselves  
In principles of humbleness and hard work  
Integrity at stake let the devil wake up  
We remember your audacity in standing up  
Against false apostles who inflicted terror on their kindred  
Perceptive and pre-emptive  
You railed against self-proclaimed messiahs  
We remember your sense of camaraderie  
Stretching a hand of fellowship to friend and foe  
Neighbour and stranger  
In the spirit of fraternity  
Sunrise to sunset  
We remember we remember.

## Down by the hills and valleys of Njembeng

Down by the hills and valleys of Njembeng a child is born  
Nurtured and livened he was by the wintry harmattan and  
pelting tropics  
Moulded he was by the chores of tilling and tapping  
And acculturated he was by folklore and the *ndek*

Down by the plains of Eba  
Lamb-like he drank from the spring of knowledge  
By the plateau of Ebab, Mohagmo, and Meta  
He refined and defined his vocation

Down by the plains of Eba  
He flamed little minds  
Deep and determined they mined his ore  
Of lore, love, and allure

Down by the hills and valleys of Njembeng resides him  
A tree primed with plums  
Serene and sanguine of footprints in his trail  
That all may pause and ponder.

## Muted Voices

the grief-stricken alleys of *inyibad*  
strewn by the petals of flowers and leaves  
flaunting their somber faces skyward  
in remembrance of your feel and favour  
huddled together in harmattan they await you  
for their sojourns in farm furrows  
or beneath the trunks of plantain trees

the air is weary and eerie  
leafy branches drip water  
the abode desolate and dreary  
doors ajar and agonizing  
contrite by the absence of the mellifluous whistling  
that regenerates and rejuvenates the landscape

the flora dies and is reborn  
rain and sun succeed each other  
crisscrossing of familiar and unfamiliar faces  
all lacking the constancy of one  
gentle, gracious, and infectious  
the permanence of the patio  
the steadfastness of the home and hedge  
speak of you today, tomorrow, and forever.

## On Crossing the Threshold

Model of meekness and modesty

You triumphantly traversed mundane turmoil of flesh and spirit

Your religiosity and tenacity the anchor

Tis still fresh in the mind how in an iron bird

You spread the Good News in Akwaya

Like the cascading falls of Egiakoh

You wedded faith with fearlessness in your endeavours

Always a step ahead of your generation.

Tell Ijinjing, tell Abaufei that the seeds are sprouting

Let Etabah and Abu Ano know that the roots are rooted

And Forkwa, Tugwa, Ngebe be informed that the torch has passed on

The shimmering light scintillates every crevice

Let you and them constantly nudge our spirits

Till ours and yours subsume forever.

## Reminiscence

Bland huckleberry cannot seize our appetite  
May hot cooked cocoyam peel your back  
Then thy name becomes swallowing cocoyam  
Juveniles plagued by figures in the turbulence of modernity  
Some resolving life challenges with the posterior  
In the middle of the river bed  
Fifty years to the past and fifty staring at us  
Chicken deliciously prepared by a poisoned hand  
Finds its abode in the lavatory  
That's how bad humanity can be  
Some handwriting like a hen scratching the earth  
But then seasoned palm wine can preoccupy the mouth  
Consumed in excess the mouth becomes restless  
Like one possessed by a spirit  
Making you an *achatawa*\*  
Although you pride in a grasshopper  
Aim at capturing an antelope.

\*Disreputable person

## **You are not gone**

You are not gone

Because you are the hissing wind that blows in my face

Because you are the gentle August rain

Because you are the soothing early sunrise

Because you are the radiance of the rainbow

When I wake up every morning

You are the cheerful sound of the robin

You are the soft sound of the broom on the verandah

You are not gone

Because you are the beaming moon in the sky

And you are the sprouts of an April farm.

## **The Cradler**

Repository of laudable personal and family values  
Undaunted in your drive to touch every heart  
To the community you serve as model  
Harnessing their virtues to uplift humankind

Objective in your vision that is  
Grounded in selflessness and fulsomeness  
We flutter round you like butterflies  
Enchanted by radiance of character.



## **The Hawk**

Symbol of the family's coat of arms  
As they confront worldly challenges  
Swift of foot and daring in feat  
The hawk paces without retreating  
Engaging daunting duties for its noblesse  
Eyes focused on its mission  
Its strength and pride shine through its enterprise  
Undeterred by its detractors  
It roams reassuringly across the sky  
Relishing further exploits to stretch its frontiers  
Of power, pace, and pride  
From its forbears the hawk rarely slumbers and slips  
As it flaps its feathers to fan fortitude and foresight in its  
kind.

## Moments

Moments of anxiety held me  
Moments of nostalgia plagued me  
Moments of expectation troubled me  
Moments of love gripped me

Moments of the past haunted me  
Father spoke like a prophet  
Ancestor talked with certainty  
Friend had long envisioned moment

Still moments of uncertainty clouded me  
As I pen these thoughts  
Each moment jostles me as I dream the moment  
When book and love shall unite for eternity.

## The Vision

Sunny weather it was  
Beacon of emotions  
Setting Eden and auspicious  
Instead relics of love flooded my mind  
A nightmare of yore it was  
As I stretched my arm to catch the maiden  
Anguish greeted me

I saw a delicate mango face  
Scintillating rays of romance  
Smart of foot and lonesome of eye  
A smile she wore on the face  
As I edged my hand to clasp the maiden  
Anguish derided me

Was it real or a vision?  
A bright ray of light trailed my window  
I stared and stepped on it  
It broadened and laughed at me  
In a flash, anguish overcame hope.

## The Search

One and twenty seasons I searched  
Stones I upturned and in streets I sought recreation  
Pubs and squares I visited  
In search of Divine's creation

Futile seemed the dreary and exacting task  
Optimism appeared to bow down to pessimism  
Should I relent or should I pursue the endeavour?  
Pessimism wrestled with optimism

A prize indeed it was  
Exquisite in beauty and radiating comfort  
The maiden truly was.  
Was the wait worth the patience?  
Like the legendary lizard  
In pride and grace arched my head.

## Legs

They came flaunting themselves  
Delicate bosoms  
Straight limbs  
Full systems  
Progenies of Gonne

Stung I was by sensation  
I raised my head  
But the parade was unending  
Balked by precepts and doubt  
I shielded my flute.

## Garnering

My heart raced with anxiety  
Thoughts of glee rivaled those of anguish  
Regarding where to anchor the vicissitudes of  
Time, place, and vocation

Behind the scenes she  
Welded thoughts and actions  
Love, poise and ingenuity her assets  
As she united friends and family in merriment

Three seasons ago I was at the foot of the Rocky  
Determined to ascend the peak in search of the academic  
fleece  
In one hand a testament of my sacrifices and  
In the other love and benevolence

Clad in my ebony suit, sky-blue shirt  
I strutted in the warmth of friends  
With a glow cast over me in reminiscence  
Of my beloved

I beamed like an eagle on iroko  
As beloved, friends and family made me soar  
In my trail joy, wardrobe and love  
As legacies of devotion and compassion.

## Engo'o

Munificent in your undertakings  
Inspirational in mothering  
Radiant in your smile  
Auspicious in outlook  
Blooming in your endeavours  
Exuding love and care and  
Letting a trail in your step.

## Loneliness

Turning and twisting in bed  
My mind wheeled in thoughts  
Thumping pages of stories  
As I nursed my ennui

Six seasons of romance rolled down memory lane  
I ached and yelled out as I retraced the pleasant past  
In reliving the pleasures of yore  
My jaws drooped

Overcome by loneliness and despair  
I strove to wed the past and present  
Certain that this will overcome my qualms  
Still my eyes were drowned in water

I meditated on life  
A taper that ebbs away fast  
Determined I was to catch the rose  
Deeper I sank in the sea of tears.



## Where am I?

They bustled with animation amidst peals of laughter  
Songs of rap and sentimental filled the air  
Memories of romantic weekends echoed on every lip  
I was at a night club last Saturday, burning it out with my  
paramour  
Said a female rider  
Oh!, did you see April's latest catch? burst another  
In the whirlpool of romantic outpourings  
I reviewed the meaning of romance

The bus hissed and swayed  
Delicately finding its course in the labyrinthine road  
Clusters of trees and neatly trimmed meadows  
Sprawling huts dwarfed the splendour of nature  
Ou vas-tu? popped in my mind  
The steady snoring of the bus muffled  
The serenity of trees, the glamour of flowers, the radiance of  
the sun  
And the chit-chat of Cupid's disciples reeled my mind

Once I had thought and felt like the riders  
Once I was callow and cheery  
But now a gulf stood between me and the throng  
Their giggles and fun sounded distant to me  
Is it otherness, the cultural-age divide  
That jars the melody of Venus that they howled  
Or is the nightingale singing weirdly to a weird ear  
In a wilderness?

## Echoes of the Sea

They streamed out of the listless sea  
Arrayed in various colours and shapes  
Brown, black, white, crimson

On the heels of steady rain drops  
They flaunted their delicate bodies and beauty  
In the lead position were the ducks  
They swayed to the hissing wind  
To the beating rain they marched in files

Above the ducks fluttered the shearwaters  
Under the vigil of the seagull as it  
Conducted them in parades across the sky  
They whistled and sang in response to the chilling rain

I watched in bewilderment  
At the bounty of nature  
At the feathered race  
As they chanted and beamed  
To the serenity of trees, to the rumbling of the sky  
And to the worries of humankind.

## Park Memories

It was a lovely summer Tuesday  
Janik and I basked in the splendour of nature  
Stretches of never-ending green beamed at us  
Short, leafy trees greeted us with incessant hiss  
The whistling foliage competed with the dull  
Drone of grass cutting machines

In the horizons birds flew in ecstasy  
Above the dead still lake  
Ducks taunted each other in a display of grin and acrobatics  
Dozen of fishing boats plundered the water  
In search of sea creatures  
Little boys sped across the water in tiny, agile boats  
Like shooting stars

The wind incessantly hissed into our faces  
Restraining our ears to the melody of seagulls  
The lapping of the rippling water  
The twirls of joyous fishes  
Such commingling of sounds and sights  
Cannot but entice the beholder to the totality of existence.

## Clusters of trees

clusters of trees shouldering each other  
to the indigenes are their life source  
the abode of ancestral spirits  
nurse of humanity  
provider of wood for the hearth  
game for the belly  
the leaves and stems are the antidote  
to bodily and spiritual ailments

across the sea where sky scrapers and trees wrestle each other  
clusters of trees shouldering each other  
to the indigenes are their pastime  
the escape from the tedium of life  
where the eye satisfies its curiosity  
where heart strings are knotted or tugged

clusters of trees  
to one eye it is the forest  
to the other eye it is the park  
to humanity it regenerates and rejuvenates.

## Long Holidays

When the early rains of June start falling  
They bring to me feelings of renewal of nature and love  
Dreams of the long holidays and fond memories of father,  
mother, and siblings  
I embrace school chores with ecstasy  
No longer do the onerous exams curb my joys  
Thoughts of the greenery of the countryside overwhelm me  
The corn stalks pregnant with healthy harvest  
The soil pumped with delectable fresh groundnuts  
The trees covered in a rich foliage of black and red plums  
Mango trees limping under the weight of tempting fruits  
The air filled with singing of birds  
As they flaunt their beauty from one tree branch to another  
My mind races towards the awaited long holidays  
The moment when tripod fires in kitchens in the countryside  
reveal their pleasures  
The delectable corn roasting under the heat of wood  
The bulging plums laughing loudly on the simmering wood  
ash  
My mouth waters as I anticipate the time  
When family, friends, and visitors congregate  
Round a hearth savouring the special pleasures of the rainy  
season.

## Saturday Nite

Anxious am I of you  
A time to shed weeklong drudgery  
A time to nestle with Morpheus

As the rain rubs the corrugated roof  
It lulls me into sleep  
A moment to travel to distant lands  
Dreaming of palatial abodes and delectable foods

Behold I find myself dropping into a sinkhole  
In vain I try to climb myself out  
My heart quakes feverishly  
I perspire like one swimming across the Dudum  
Suddenly I scramble out of bed  
And am greeted by the sleek pelts of the morning rain.

## Nightfall

As the day closes its eyes  
Giving way to its sister season  
Cloaks of darkness descend onto earth  
Bringing lull to human activities  
In the peace and silence of the night  
Humans relive their quotidian lives  
Dreaming away time well spent and wasted  
Their minds hallucinate about  
Bungled and fulfilled dreams  
Of ways to amend faded dreams

Burrowed in the thick of the night  
Wake up time for hoodlums  
Pondering plots of misery and mischief  
Forging plans to disrupt nature  
The peace and pace of night on the edge

The barking of dogs  
The cackle of roosters  
The rumbling of the storm  
At these sounds those of no virtue  
Tremble like jugs half full of palm wine  
Submitting themselves to the righteousness of nature.

## Cricket Hunting

With the rains creeping in  
Trees regain their allure  
Stems ebullient and branches luxuriant  
The landscape recaptures its greenery  
Refreshing, flourishing and relaxing it is  
Like frothing palm wine

The night is cold and charming  
At the threshold of their tunnels  
Crickets are chirping  
With their ebony feathers outstretched  
They taunt us with their melody and courage

Guided by our torches  
We tiptoe with machetes ready  
To bar these seasonal delicacies  
From the safety of their abodes

Though often outsmarted by the agility of these insects  
Our furtive nocturnal trips  
Our giggles, songs, and stories  
Compensate for our futile missions  
To bring the crickets to the searing pot on the tripod.



## Grasshoppers

Harmattan is here  
Its sober solemn look  
Chills human bones  
Deprives vegetation of lushness  
Trees and landscape have lost lustre  
Like an orphan child fed by a grudging stepmother

Time for the egrets to roam freely the sky  
Time for us to savour the blessings of the season  
Perching in hordes on every tree and blade of grass  
The grasshoppers have lost their vibrancy  
Like creatures in purgatory their future is in doubt  
Children and adults avail themselves of nature's bounty  
Seasoned and spiced they are  
A treat of the harmattan  
A dessert to spark conversation.

## Death

Voices fought for air time  
Desolation here and shrieks there  
Death in every clime  
The frown on a goat's face  
Cannot prevent it from being priced at the market  
I shrived myself  
Walking in a zigzag mood  
Crowds wailed in agonizing tones  
The night bird raged on  
Hearts heavy and men moaned  
The mad cow raced at everything  
And humans and beast and trees fell  
As death spread its long wing  
It pulled the vicious into hell  
I saw death weary and desolate  
As humankind now to virtue relate.

## Christmas

Christ  
Clothes  
Hymns  
Food  
Wine  
Dance  
Itchy throats  
Whetted appetites  
Pleasant flavours  
Of chicken, fish, and goat  
Kitchens emit tantalizing smells  
Houses adorned with trees and cards  
The sun beams in joy and praise  
The trees have shed their foliage  
The horizon looks distant and clear  
The mountains are dreary, aged, and enchanting  
Birds chirp in bliss and animals shiver in ecstasy  
The wind whistles and hisses in the face in symmetry with the  
collective trance.

## Sunday

Chirps and cackles of birds  
Arrows of light  
Voices of the faithful  
Lull of labour  
Welcome you

Mirth and merry in houses  
Crates of wine and bowls of food  
Bodies make contortions  
Sounds pierce the air  
In praise of Sunday  
Confined in solitude  
Stung in the neck and posterior  
Aching from pain and desire  
I pined in bed  
Misery and gloom my companion

Though Sunday it was for many  
In vain I strove to grasp any.

## Forlorn

It's four o'clock  
The horizon is dark and dull  
The hills gloomy and weeping  
The weather chilly and teary  
The sky pregnant

My home is gaping and icy  
No streaming images  
No sofa  
No object of fancy

Only a little talking box  
As I guard this lonesome place  
Wobbling my eyes to spot humankind  
My heart is forlorn  
In the grip of expectation  
Tears flood my eyes.



## The Squirrel

Though small of stature and not revered  
You are smart of foot  
Nestled in a shrub or in a foliage of leaves  
You hold the key to knowledge  
Many flock to you when misfortune strikes them  
When fingers are pointed at each other  
Or tongues wag out of rhythm  
When we have misgivings on anything  
Death, accident, sickness  
We seek your counsel  
Ancient as the hills around you  
You have delivered your verdict fearlessly  
To the old and the young, the rich and the poor  
You have been steadfast in your ruling  
Dashing out of the treetop to vindicate innocence  
Or diving into the recesses of the forest  
To awaken a blighted conscience.

## The Rooster

In this age old community still untainted by the slings of  
modernity

With trees and the vegetation lush and fresh

The plains placid, extensive, and inviting

Hills roll into each other beneath a broad blue sky

The wind ceaselessly blows in the face

And the sun beams heartedly over the plains

Dusk catches people huddled in their huts

Nestled round hearths telling stories

Creation myths of the past, legends who saved the people in  
times of crisis

Tales of courage, virtue, and precept late into the night

Coco coo . . . coco coo . . .

Like a military drill the village wakes up early morning

Men with machetes women with hoes slung on the shoulders

The village troops enthusiastically to the farms, to their  
sustenance, and quotidian life

Isn't it a marvel how the feathery race reminds humans to  
make optimal use of time?



## The Maiden Spirit

Red brick hut with a thatched roof  
The abode of the village maiden  
Cradle of fertility and guardian of the farms  
The wind whistles past her shrine  
Like a rushing rivulet  
Age old as the oak overhead it  
The eternal maiden is omnipresent  
Visible yet invisible  
Gourds of palm wine, kola nut, fresh sprouts  
Tangible signs of village gratitude  
To their deliverer

Every season the village throngs  
To her abode  
To re-thatch and re-wall it  
With supplications  
With gratitude  
Whoever shows favour  
Gets a favour in return.

## The Diviner

Half his face painted in clay  
The other half covered in camwood  
He struts slowly like a masked spirit  
Holding inaudible exchanges with esoteric spirits  
Head crowned with headgear of exotic feathers  
Of vulture, eagle, cock and crow  
A dark brown raffia bag hangs loosely on his shoulder  
In the rainbow bag clasped firmly in his left hand  
Kola nut, cowries, alligator pepper, peace plant  
Symbols of his uncanny and unpredictable nature  
As he walks the jingling sound from his bags  
His mute conversations with invisible spirits  
Send shivers down the spines of onlookers  
He forges relationships between the living and the living dead  
Of peace, progress, and permanence.

## Who am I?

Can someone tell me who am I?

I know that I am human, born and nurtured in nature  
Armed with the senses of sight, feel, touch, and smell  
I wine and dine like all living things

I know how to speak Duala, Mungaka, and Ngie  
I enjoy *ekwang*, *akwa*, and *achu* washed with palm wine  
I can wear *indwifon* and walk like a king  
My raffia bag harbours a cow horn, kola nut and snuff  
But who am I?

I can play the *ndek* and drum messages  
Dressed in my multi-coloured skirt and assorted headgear  
I sway to the rhythm of *Ichibi*, *Asondere*, and *Adene*  
Play *Makossa*, disco or reggae and you find me gyrating  
But then who am I?

I walk with the springs of an antelope  
And strut with grace of a zebra  
I speak with the ponder of a horse and the hum of a bee  
And laugh like a cock yet bleat like a lamb  
Still I know not who I am.

## The Pacifier

Fury and muddle in the compound  
Children wailing as though it was doomsday  
Sounds of broken utensils catch people off guard  
The lord has gone berserk  
Emotions guiding his reason

*Egusi* pudding in a delicately knit basket  
Shrouded in multi-coloured cloth  
Restores peace and harmony  
This I am told is the domestic pacifier in the Grassfields.

## **Atupid \***

(For Martha Ndaya)

Your fountains are everywhere in the Grassfields  
Libations and divinations must cease without you  
Cousin to mbuh\* and fitchu\*  
Spirits that make us happy  
spirits that make us tardy  
Your milky face smiles in darkness  
Your fragrance seduces men to you  
They eat you up while you eat them down  
You are the kernel of truth  
Turning stubborn lips into restless mouths  
we divulge and devour in your company  
we disintegrate and disrobe at your prompting  
You ennoble and dishonour us  
Bridging us with the living dead  
breaching our decorum and discipline with the living  
In your presence we sanctify and revel  
in your presence we abjure and implode.

\*strong palm wine

## Ululations

Early morning in a teeming city  
Women haggle over goods in a crowded market  
Men whet their throats in overflowing bars  
Children play games on the streets  
Twelve noon  
The city loses its pulse  
People pour into the streets  
Human activities come to a sudden halt  
Like a zoo screams rend the air  
There's rattling of empty vessels  
Drum beating and jingling of keys  
Producing a symmetry of sounds  
Ululations for the sit tight tyrant  
To listen to his people  
To relinquish rulership.

## Once there Lived a Lady

Once there lived a lady blessed with abundance  
Of grace, compassion, love, and bounty  
Humbled, righteous, and assiduous she was  
Meticulous, understanding, neat, dynamic, innovative  
Her compound bustled with life  
As relatives, friends, and neighbours routinely flocked there  
Some sojourned there briefly while others till adulthood  
Though of moderate resources she had  
She saw every person as a child of creation  
Blessed she was with the art of singing  
Her angelic voice rent the air  
At church services  
At singing competitions

In the face of adversity  
She imbued courage and tenacity  
Perceiving all things as learning experiences  
Of God, of man in the earthly journey  
Blessed she was with the gift of life

Although she's embraced a celestial life  
Relatives, friends, and neighbours invoke her memory  
On how to live, love, and die.

## Ngebe

Lean, luminous, and elegant she looked  
Eyes patient and perceptive  
Each time she scanned the sky  
Gentle and gracious in the way she strode the world  
Her speech soft and sagacious  
But like a silent volcano  
She erupted when teased  
“Ano mind”  
Upon hearing these words  
She charged forward like a reindeer  
Fuming fury  
If words lost potency the truncheon triumphed.



## Takumbeng\*

At the peril of your virility, progeny, or life  
Retrace your way as they approach  
Take shelter in some shade  
Close your eyes or look in the opposite direction  
They look imperious in their walk  
Justice is their bidding and with grace they embrace it  
The Takumbeng are firm, dignified in their walk  
Though elderly they may appear, they instill  
Hope and courage in people  
They are the unsung heroines of Cameroon's democracy  
Their powdery hair a testament of their  
Wisdom and righteousness of cause  
With sealed lips and serene faces  
They look fearless  
Sirens accompany their march  
As clad in Nature's attire  
The Takumbeng are unabashed of their appearance  
With synchronized steps in rhythm with their heaving  
bosoms  
These elderly women send the young and the old, male and  
female

\*A group of elderly women, in the North West Region of Cameroon, who often militate against injustice.

Soldiers and civilians scampering for shelter  
Protectors of the defenceless  
Beacon of justice, custodians of culture  
Many look up to you  
In pursuit of justice, in pursuit of hope, in pursuit of courage  
Canons, red berets, tear gas  
Cannot change your resolve  
Cannot deter your cause.

## The Village Courier

Gentle as a dove he is  
A burst of smile occasionally flashes his face  
When he's eaten his fill  
When he's drunk a calabash of wine  
He will walk the frontiers of the clan  
Enthusiastically and tirelessly he embraces his endeavours  
Running errands for the ordinary folk and  
Gratuitously fetching water for the needy  
An antelope never saw its like  
As he rushes through his tasks  
Speed and precision his virtues  
Now he's regained his sanity  
Talking excitedly about his sojourn in distant lands  
Of his friends, wife, and family

Another day brings out his other temperament  
Stinging like a bee he is  
Mute like the \*Feg in the dry season  
But like a wasp he takes umbrage  
At the least provocation  
At the least supplication  
Broom, pan, and stool fly in every direction  
As the lion in him rages on  
Such is his conflicting personality  
A man of peace, passion, and temper  
Such is the legacy of Jonas.

\*a small river

## Okakan

Listen as he berates his opponents  
Like thunder peals his torrid voice tears through  
neighbouring villages  
Of his strength and courage  
Though feeble and elderly he never stops to boast and boo  
First to engage in physical confrontation  
First to taunt his adversary  
First to be rescued  
And first to make up for his lack of stamina  
What Okakan lacks in strength he compensates with  
rhetorical power

Once he rushed into a fight and got a fright  
The wind could knock him down easily  
Once the provocative Okakan met more than his match  
Within the blink of an eye he was sent crumbling down  
Like a boulder rolling down Eteiweit\*  
But for the intervention of onlookers  
He would have been pulp for his younger stronger challenger

Okakan's mouth kept running  
Running like water on a slippery rock  
He was tactically lying down  
Contemplating crushing blows at his challenger  
Such was his boast and belief  
Making words compensate lack of strength  
With one blow he would have battered his opponent  
Such fiery words from Okakan caused consternation  
As reality and rhetoric collide.

\*a steep hill

## The Extraordinary Pupil

Hoary as he was huge  
Daring as he was academically deficient  
Asongtu was aloof to school and deaf to twelve  
He went through school without school going through him  
He queried his teacher whenever he got failed scores  
“How dare you scribble red marks on my script?,” he  
confronted him.  
“Is it with me you want to demonstrate your teacher role?,”  
he added.  
Asongtu could get away with anything  
Using age and rhetoric to his advantage  
When his teacher read aloud the class results at the end of  
each term  
Asongtu always was number 60 out of 60  
One time Asongtu’s father asked him his rank in class  
“I am still in my old house,” he replied  
This is the way Asongtu made light of his poor performance  
When challenged by his mother why he couldn’t pass his  
exams  
He fumed this response:  
“Why don’t you attend adult school like other women rather  
than  
critique my performance?”  
Bemused and exasperated the parents looked on  
At a child grown fearless and fearsome without intellectual  
curiosity.

## The Parade

Weary and wiry they all looked in appearance  
Synchronized and sturdy were their footsteps  
They are the remnants of the African war gear against  
Germany  
Millions of eyes watched the ex-servicemen  
Trudge to the rhythm of a military tune  
Eyes poised and chests thrust  
They paraded to the delight of onlookers  
“Left Right,” “Left Right” shouted the lead sergeant  
Their heavy boots thumping the turf  
They marched beyond the ceremonial grounds  
Beyond the edge of the field into adjacent farms  
Faithful and compliant they followed the orders of their  
leader  
Trampling crops in the farm  
Laughing heartedly the sergeant said  
“I forgot the words About Turn”

## Unoh Market

Hemmed between two towering hills  
Spread like a broken calabash in a raffia bush  
Unoh teems and sways to the rhythm of shoppers  
The Feg roars beyond the clan  
As neighbouring clans troop to you  
Goats, sheep, and cows wail  
As they are traded for cash  
Glittering palm oil empty into huge jars  
Gleaming palm wine flow down whetted throats  
Young girls with baskets loaded with groundnuts  
Haggle their fortune with excited clients  
Waists sway in sweaty bars to the rhythm of *Akarikossa*  
Beer glides hastily down undulating throats  
Of people now like question marks  
They brandish their latest *Ashogge*, shoes, skirts, and headgear  
Men, women, and children  
To the delight of onlookers  
To the blast of musical sounds  
To the blaring of car horns  
And the twittering of birds  
And the neighing of horses  
As they watch humans manifest collegial emotions.

## Eba

I may be physically distant  
Yet culturally connected to you  
You modulate my thoughts  
You regulate my speech  
Turning the literal to the connotative  
I shape my gait along the contours of your landscape  
I inflect my voice in line with  
your rushing rivers, hissing winds, and rattling walks  
I mould my character along  
the serenity of your scenery, the lushness of your flora  
and the purity of your sky  
You run in my blood  
turning horrid into hope, loss into love  
Giving mirth and meaning to existence.



## Bamenda

Suspended on four hills  
The peak of which looks monstrous  
Making travelers catch their breaths  
As they descend to you

You are a big bowl  
Bright faces here, hands of welcome there  
Hospitality is thy garment

I hear you bar your teeth  
Flex your muscles  
In defence of liberty

From the thick of the forest  
To the heart of snowy land  
You roar like a lion

Instilling courage in lambs  
Living in dens.

## Kuyam

Midday in Dschang

The pig is crossing the road

Thousands of stooped heads.

## Africa

Africa, Africa arise from the shadow of your underachievement

Arise from the slough of war, from the scourge of prejudice

Awake to the drum of political, socio-economic sustenance

Relive your legendary status of generosity, sensuality, and as the cradle of civilization

Through forums of discussion, mass media outlets, we shall celebrate your achievements

Through cultural exchanges and book clubs, we shall disseminate underreported information about you

By bringing together the elderly and the young, the coloured and the biracial, the informed and the misinformed, blacks and whites

We shall champion you in a global context

From the banks of the Nile to the summit of Kilimanjaro

We shall foster understanding among your offspring

From the caravans in Timbuktu to the heart of the Kalahari

You are endowed with abundance

From the shores of the Atlantic to the frontiers of the Pacific

We shall facilitate valuable discourse on democracy, culture, business, and economics

Between you and the rest of humanity.



## Forsaken Dream

I rolled and tossed about in the grip of fortune  
Soaked in the beauty and grandeur of dream  
Meditating on the twists and turns of life  
Caged I was in a distant land

Forever overwhelmed in thoughts of hope  
Seduced by far-flung promises of glory  
Gold by the street and bills by the tree  
Jingling coins strewn along the road

The yield is ripe and ready for harvest  
Millions craned their necks at the dinner table  
Each with a bowl and ladle for the feast  
Feast it was for the tall and not all.

## **Brighten the Corner where You are**

Brighten the corner where you are  
Make personal aggrandizement a touchstone  
Moral probity, intellectual honesty, and self-reliance your  
modus vivendi  
In consonance with brightening your corner

Birds shall sing and animals leap in the air  
Yonder dreams shall become reality  
Surrounding valleys and mountains shall resonate  
Provided you brighten your corner

Houses, cars, estates plentiful  
Families and friends shall trail your path  
Foes and detractors reeling backwards  
In reaction to your brightening the corner.

## Medal

Merit driven is thy emblem  
ever often perceived as marker of excellence  
dogged and dedicated we strive for your recognition  
aspiring to be exemplary in work and life  
letting others follow our footprints.

## What's Truth?

What's truth?

Is it big, small, thick or thin?

How do we know truth?

By its smell, feeling, taste, or touch?

What colour is truth—blue, black, white, or yellow?

Is truth permanent, temporary, or transitional?

Does it rust over time?

Is it lodged in specific places under given temperatures?

Among particular people?

Of high or low birth? Rich or poor? Learned or unlearned?

Is it a prerogative of a particular race?

Is it experienced in the same way by blacks, whites, coloured, male, female, transgender?

Is it a privilege of the West, North, or South?

Does truth live within or beyond us?

Or is it visible only to the elderly or young?

Does truth grow or starve in the wet season or dry season?

Nowadays, the more we attempt to define truth the more elusive it is.



## Money

When he had money  
Friends and relatives were plenteous  
They drank and dined daily  
He listened to the sweet talk of life  
Company and comfort never lacked

when he became penniless  
lonesomeness and listlessness were his associates  
sorrow and sickness kept vigil over him  
by his door and bed  
depriving him of love and life.

## Repassez Demain

Behind a tall table of files  
A lean, weary, foxy gentleman  
In a stain draped shirt with overlapping cuffs  
Sits restlessly combing through tons of paper  
Like a bee he orders and disorders his wares  
A composite of opposing emotions wrench him  
Rancorous, taciturn, sullen, and bigoted  
Cheerful, garrulous, encouraging, and enticing  
Rustling bank notes determine which emotion to foreground  
Columns of anxious weary public servants in front of him  
As he burrows and thumbs through  
The dust laden stacks before him  
Green for an upward motion  
Grey for a downward motion  
Hope, promise, and progress  
Desolation, acrimony, and retrogression  
The bilingual context renders him monolingual  
He beams and boasts about his selflessness  
In milking the national cow  
From which we all draw sustenance.

## Everyone

*(For Grandpa Peter Mbakwa)*

Everyone is challenged to meditate on heritage  
To bequeath the new generation  
Attributes which inspire and empower  
Because this endeavor enriches and ensures  
A better humanity.

## Portrait of a Land Rover

Sturdy, solid and undeterred in appearance  
Panting and perspiring it engages the monstrous hill defiantly  
The Rover hiccups and howls as it agonizes to a stop midway  
Dizzy and dispirited it reels to the base of the hill  
Shaking off some of the burden on its trunk  
The Rover whines and screeches as its rear hits the bank with  
a stomp  
Exhausted it suddenly slumps into a coma  
After successive epileptic fits the engine comes alive  
Men, women, children, goats, and chickens scramble to safety  
As it regains its potency the wheels spit thick layers of mud at  
passengers  
Then the Rover gasps for breadth farting and stuttering  
incessantly  
Furious and rumbling anger it reengages the hill  
It wails and groans to the joy of onlookers  
It grumbles and rumbles steadily to the top of the hill  
Daring it for challenging its pride  
As king of the road.

## The Woodpecker

He looks plump  
Fresh and smooth like a tadpole  
His jaws filled out  
His eyes searching and ominous

He looks kempt  
With ebony luxuriant hair  
Dark trimmed jacket

He smells sweet  
Of soothing mellow fragrance  
He speaks like a waterfall  
Conflating garrulity with eloquence

He is a perfect woodpecker  
Drilling holes into the baobab  
That shall crush us all.

## The Prophet

With both ears cocked  
As he cranes his neck in every direction  
Serene and sagacious he looks  
He crouches towards the east  
Then he swerves towards the west  
Holding solo dialogues with interlocutors

Wait a minute  
Yaoundé is on the line  
I hear rumblings in the sky  
You'll be the next . . .  
Fear not nothing will change

He was partially clothed in Adam's apparel  
His belly bursting from the seams  
Held in check by cloth wrapped around his waist  
Behind him stood his page with bulging pockets  
Prophet dialogued with the esoteric  
People pressed and stared wide-eyed at him.

## Here They Come Again

Here they come again  
In sleek sturdy cars  
Sweaty, swearing and chanting calumnies  
Kempt, charming, convincing they all seem  
Selflessness, sincerity, dignity they do lack  
Here they come again  
Positioning themselves for positions  
Under the tropical sun, under the equatorial rain  
Like a circus they chant, chat, and cheat  
Every season brings familiar faces with the same ramble  
To a half credulous and half righteous multitude  
They squirm, squeak, and scream  
The deliverer—cynical, comical, and capricious  
Scoffs at their antics, agility, and ambitions  
Here he comes again  
Doling posts, medals, and stools  
In frenzy and fright he stretches his hand  
Lifting fanatics and sitting them on stools  
Far beneath the high table over which  
He lords and loots for a living.

## The Gadfly

Wise, perspicacious, and humorous you are  
Though some people question your sanity, you are Solomon  
Wily you appear like an eucalyptus tree  
Powerful as you lift jugs of wine with bare hands  
I remember your cravings for alcohol  
When you stated that alcohol must be consumed  
Because it is meant to be drunk  
Yet its smell often intoxicates you  
And you then spew invectives at everybody  
I remember when you indicted a politician  
For stuffing a cock in his car with its wings fluttering  
I remember when you reproached a *\*mbere*  
For being pregnant with a he goat  
I remember when you hurled diatribe after diatribe  
At your detractors  
“If rice were good for human sanity  
Why don’t you consume it too?”  
“How greedy you are like your chickens!”  
Beneath your semblance of lunacy  
Are embedded wisdom and knowledge  
Gracious and eloquent you are  
But impertinent upon provocation  
You would say to your teasers  
“Let the balls not only swell, but they should pain and then  
explode.”  
Rock of ages you are  
Depository of wisdom and humour  
You are to the community.

*\*mbere* refers to a police man



## **Tell me What it is**

When mouths yawn in hunger  
And vent words of disgust  
When bodies ache  
And filth invades cities  
Tell me what it is

When a lord arrogates power and wealth  
Turns his eye when cronies bathe in affluence  
When a castle is fortified by barrels  
And a palace flowing lust  
Tell me what it is

When men numb their senses and sing odes  
With tummies overblown  
When kinsmen cum Ananias swear truth  
And glory in deceit and servitude  
Tell me what it is

When a nation crawls under abuse  
And a people yell out riddance  
When the cream seeks bread beyond the native land  
But the crown pursues apathy and entropy  
Tell me, tell me what it is.

## The Messiah

He filled up his belly with grain  
And stuffed his stomach with liquor  
But starved himself of modesty  
He loaded his pockets with wads of bills  
But emptied his head of lore  
He craned his neck into the sky  
Amidst deafening drumbeats  
The soil gave way beneath him  
And he was swallowed in it  
Ignominy is his epithet  
history is written in water.

## The Griots

They kept talking  
Like a waterfall  
Like the whistling wind

They kept singing  
Like a songbird?  
No, like Babel  
Like metal

On on and on  
They went  
In falsehood  
In praises  
Of the messiah

They kept sniffing  
Like dogs  
Like rats  
For crumps  
For recognition

Prostrate across its triangular abode  
The lion flapped its mane  
Talk, song, and praise  
Left it insensitive  
Unnerved  
Numbed  
To distant catcalls.



Breadth taking in range of subject explored and profound in depth of emotions evoked, this collection of poems chronicles different shades of emotions resulting from personal loss and love, as well as celebrates and critiques issues of culture, nature, place, people, ethics, and politics. The language is luminous and honed by refreshing and suggestive imagery.

“Crafty in the language of the people and written in a tone that combines the hushes of betrayal, the jubilation of celebration, the victory of life, the frustration of defeat, the exhilaration of new found love, the disappointments of great political expectations, and the failure to carve a personal niche in a global society still in the thralls of a Yeatsian gyration, Usongo’s poetry transcends place, time and nationality. I will strongly recommend this book to lovers and students of the human soul, and as a window to the other world, which is both alien and immediate.”

- **DR EMMANUEL NGWANG, PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH, JARVIS  
CHRISTIAN COLLEGE, HAWKINS, USA**

“**RUMINATIONS OF IPOME** is a composite collection that roughly covers several trajectories in Anglophone Cameroon literature, including patriotic fervour and nationalistic doubts, diasporic convergence of identities against demographic and cultural parallels, historical as well as spiritual and cultural imprints of how the self can be divided without denying its roots. In it, Usongo is very personal in expressing even common sentiments like those of love and death; and even the complementary theme of nature’s abundance is narrated in confessional tones of a lullaby, a dirge, and a celebration. For those who have unfairly stigmatized Anglophone Cameroon literature as a discourse on the legitimate and worrying Anglophone Problem, this well-structured collection is evidence of the variegated nature of our literature.”

- **DR MBUH TENNU MBUH, ENGLISH DEPARTMENT UNIVERSITY OF  
YAOUNDE I CAMEROON**

**KENNETH USONGO** holds a PhD in Comparative literature from the University of Denver, as well as a doctorate in English literary studies from the University of Yaoundé 1. He has published two dozen refereed essays in English, Postcolonial, and American literatures as book chapters and journal articles in Transnational Literature, Matatu, Alizés, and other revues.



**Langaa Research & Publishing  
Common Initiative Group  
P.O. Box 902 Mankon  
Bamenda  
North West Region  
Cameroon**

ISBN 978-9956-791-82-8



9 789956 791828